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CHURCH AND CREED.

CHURCH and creed were born together. The creed is essentially a confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Saviour of men. Peter may be said to have uttered the first Christian creed when he said: "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God."* On this account he was named by the Messiah the Rock of the Church. The first confessor was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The creed was at first that confession of faith in the Messiah which was necessary to Christian baptism and to participation in the supper of the Lord in the Church. The apostolic commission, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," gave the outline of the Trinitarian creed: "I believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

So soon as the Church was organized and provision was made for the training of converts in preparation for the sacraments, this simple outline of the creed was enlarged, so as to embrace the essential doctrines of the Christian religion as conceived by the ancient Church. This enlargement of the creed was made independently in the different churches established in the provinces and cities of the Roman Empire; but gradually a consensus was attained, such as we find in the so-called Apostles' Creed and in the Nicene Creed, the latter differing from the former chiefly in that it was enlarged by the Council of Nice in 325 A.D. so as to exclude the Arians from the Church. We have to distinguish, in the Apostles' Creed, between the older form, in which there was a consensus, and the later additions to it; just as we have to distinguish between the original Nicene Creed of 325 and the Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 with the western additions. We shall arrange these in parallel columns, giving the later additions in brackets, but not attempting to

* Matt. xvi., 16.

restore to their original form the clauses that have been transposed. The parentheses show the Latin additions.*

Apostles' Creed.

1. I believe in God the Father Almighty [maker of heaven and earth.]
2. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord ;
3. Who was [conceived] by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary ;
4. [Suffered] under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, [dead], and buried ;
5. [He descended into hades]; the third day he rose again from the dead ;
6. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of [God] the Father [Almighty];
7. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
8. And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost.
9. The holy [catholic] Church ; [the communion of saints];

Nicene Creed.

1. We (I) believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker [of heaven and earth, and] of all things visible and invisible.
2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the [only begotten] Son of God, begotten of the Father [before all worlds;] (God of God), Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father ; by whom all things were made ; (both in heaven and on earth).
3. Who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down [from heaven], and was incarnate [by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary] and was made man ;
4. He [was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate ; and] suffered, [and was buried ;]
5. And the third day he rose again [according to the Scriptures]
6. [And] ascended into heaven [and sitteth on the right hand of the Father.]
7. From thence he shall come [again, with glory] to judge the quick and the dead ; [whose kingdom shall have no end.]
8. And (I believe) in the Holy Ghost, [the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father (and the Son;) who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified ; who spake by the prophets.]
- [9. (And I believe) in one holy catholic and apostolic church.]

* See Schaff's "Creeds of Christendom," pp. 12 *et seq.*

Apostles' Creed.

10. The forgiveness of sins ;
 11. The resurrection of the body
 [flesh];
 [12. And the life everlasting.]

Nicene Creed.

- [10. We (I) acknowledge one baptism
 for the remission of sins.]
 [11. And we (I) look for the resurrec-
 tion of the dead ;]
 [12. And the life of the world to
 come.]

The damnatory clauses of the Nicene Creed I have not given. They ought never to have been used with the creed. They may be appropriate as the judgment of the council, but they are not proper in public worship.

These two primitive creeds have been taken into the liturgies of the Christian Church and are a part of the public worship of Christendom. The House of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States and the Lambeth conference of the Bishops of the Church of England and her daughters did wisely when, in their plan for the reunion of Christendom, they proposed these two liturgical creeds—"the Apostles' Creed as the baptismal symbol, and the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith." It should be the aim of all Christians to rally about this position as the essential doctrinal basis of Christendom. I take no exception to any statements of these two creeds. Some of the later additions seem to me to express important doctrines. At the same time, it is my opinion that, if we could reduce these two creeds to their primitive form by striking out all the bracketed clauses, many minds would be relieved of difficulties in subscription and nothing essential to Christianity would be lost. They would still give "the sufficient statement of the Christian faith." These two creeds are suited to public worship in form and in substance. Their language is chaste and beautiful, they are devotional and easily become choral. The Christian world, with very few exceptions, heartily unite in them, and in their one harmonious faith realize the blessedness of "the communion of saints." The later creeds of the Church express division and schism. They set forth doctrinal variations which are of great importance in the science of theology, but which are not essential to Christian faith and life. The Creed of Chalcedon and the pseudo-Athanasian Creed are accepted by the great body of orthodox men in the Christian

Church, but both of them have been severely criticised by devout and honored theologians. What they have added to the two ancient creeds has not tended to the harmony of Christendom.

The Church of Christ for 1,500 years lived and grew and accomplished its greatest triumphs, destroying the ancient religions, transforming the Greek, Roman, and oriental civilizations, winning the Celtic, Germanic, and Slavonic races to Christ, without any other creeds than these. But in the sixteenth century the throes of liberty and reformation divided the Church, and large numbers of creeds, catechisms, and confessions of faith were framed in order to define the differences and to emphasize the discord of Christendom. The Greek Church produced a number of confessions and catechisms to vindicate its orthodoxy over against Rome and Wittenberg. The Protestant churches set forth their faith in the Augsburg Confession and in national symbols. The Roman Catholic Church defined the orthodox faith in the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent. All variations of Protestantism also found expression in confessions of faith and in catechisms of various kinds. These modern symbolical documents differ greatly in form and character from the ancient creeds. 1. They are not so much creeds, expressing the real faith of the people of God, as systems of orthodox doctrine, to be taught by theologians. 2. They are not designed for the worship of the people and are therefore not in the liturgical form. They are for instruction in the class room; catechisms for children; larger catechisms for adults and confessions of faith for the ministry. 3. They do not set forth in plain terms the essential doctrines of Christianity, but in learned language they give a complete exposition of Christian doctrine or else a full statement of certain particular doctrines with regard to which there have been division and debate.

If it was necessary to organize the various Protestant national churches of northern Europe, it was also necessary that these churches should define their faith in symbolical books. This made it necessary also for the Roman Catholic Church to define its position at the Council of Trent. So also when the non-conforming churches separated from the national churches there was the same historic necessity for additional symbols of faith.

These symbolic books were designed for the most part as public expressions of the faith of the national churches or of the denominations using them. They were not ordinarily intended to bind the consciences of the people or even to compel the ministry to blind subscription to all their dogmatic statements. Subscription to creeds was forced on the ministry of the British churches by the authority of the state in the interests of civil order. It was not a natural evolution of Protestantism itself. It was rather an unwholesome check to the development of Protestantism, its doctrine and life. The symbolic books of Protestantism culminated, on the continent of Europe, in the Lutheran Form of Concord and in the Reformed Canons of Dort. The Form of Concord became a form of discord in the Lutheran churches. Dr. Schaff has well said:

"During the palmy period of Lutheran scholasticism, the Formula of Concord stood in high authority among Lutherans, and was even regarded as inspired. Its first centennial [1680] was celebrated with considerable enthusiasm. But at the close of another century it was dead and buried."*

The Canons of Dort excluded Arminianism from the reformed churches, and made a division which has continued until the present time. Dr. Schaff says:

"The Canons of Dort have for Calvinism the same significance which the Formula of Concord has for Lutheranism; both betray a very high order of theological ability and care. Both are consistent and necessary developments. Both exerted a powerful and conserving influence in these churches. Both prepared the way for a dry scholasticism which runs into subtle abstractions, and resolves the living soul of divinity into a skeleton of formulas and distinctions. Both consolidated orthodoxy at the expense of freedom, sanctioned a narrow confessionalism, and widened the breach between the two branches of the Reformation."†

The Westminster Confession was later than the two scholastic symbols just mentioned. It was the fruit of the second Reformation in Great Britain, and as such full of life and vigor and thereby less scholastic than the Form of Concord and the Canons of Dort. But in some respects it is having a history similar to that of these two older symbols. As I have elsewhere said:

"It was a splendid plan to unite all parties in the three national churches of Great Britain about common symbols. But, unfortunately,

* "Creeds of Christendom," p. 336.

† Ibid., p. 515.

the king would not allow the Episcopal divines to attend, and the Assembly, with the Long Parliament, soon expelled the Episcopal party. The Presbyterian majority was intolerant toward the Congregational minority, so that, while the dissenting brethren struggled heroically for their views in the Assembly, the hostility of the Presbyterian party became so great that John Goodwin and Henry Burton, the only two pastors of London churches who were Independents, were deprived of their charges. And so the Westminster Symbols became the banners of the Presbyterian party. What, then, do we see at the present time? The Westminster Confession has been rejected by all of the historical churches of England. It is held only by the Presbyterian church of England, a small church composed chiefly of Scottish and Irish families residing in England. In Ireland, it is the symbol only of the Presbyterians of the North. It is a national creed in Scotland alone. It is used only by Presbyterians in America and the colonies. Nine tenths of the Protestants of Great Britain and America do not adhere to the Westminster Confession. It has failed in its design of displacing the Thirty-nine Articles. It has not become the one creed of Great Britain. This is the verdict of history on the Westminster Confession.”*

The movement for a revision of the Westminster Symbols, now in progress in the Presbyterian churches of the world, will probably eventually result in casting those symbols aside as barriers to church unity and as no longer suitable expressions of the faith and life of the Church in our day.

Dogmatic theology is in a state of dissolution and reconstruction. The dogmatic theologians have elaborated Protestant dogma far beyond the later symbolical books of Protestantism. Thinking men are going back to the symbols of the Reformation, and then back of these to the ecumenical creeds, and then still further back to the theology of the Bible itself. The theology of the Bible was sadly neglected by the scholastic divines, and it has found no adequate expression in the symbolical books of any of the great churches of Christendom. They, for the most part, pursued false methods of exegesis. They knew little or nothing of Biblical criticism. The lower or textual criticism, the higher or literary criticism, and historical criticism are sections of modern scientific study of the Bible. Criticism has made the Bible a new book. And the discipline of Biblical theology which builds on the results of criticism finds in the Bible a new theology—new not in the sense that it destroys any-

* “How Shall We Revise?” pp. 4-5.

thing that is valuable in the old theology; but that on the one hand it is simpler, fresher, full of life and energy, quickening and fascinating people as well as preacher, and, on the other hand, more comprehensive, more profound, more symmetrical and harmonious. It is sublime and indeed divine, because it brings us face to face with holy prophets and with God himself. The old scholastic dogmatics, in which the most of the ministry now in service have been trained and which they have been taught as the rule of faith by which to interpret Bible and history, Christian experience and human life, is now confronted by a Biblical theology that convicts it of exaggeration in human speculation, of misinterpretation of the Word of God, and of ignorance of some of the most important facts and teachings of the Scriptures. Biblical theology has made it evident that the dogmatic systems have obscured the Biblical elements with the ecclesiastical and the speculative, and have thereby too often made the word of God of no effect by their traditions.

Historical theology has undermined and destroyed, in large measure, ecclesiastical claims of the dogmaticians. We now know well the history of doctrine and the history of dogma. The story of creed-formation in the early Church, and the controversies resulting in the construction of the symbolical books of the modern churches have for the most part been made evident by the historical investigation of their sources. The claims of authority that were strong when these creeds and symbols were enveloped with a halo of mystery, which made them appear as well-nigh inspired, can no longer resist the evidence of human passions and strifes, the false use of Scripture and history, the improper methods of argumentation, the errors in philosophy and psychology that to such an extent influenced the authors of the creeds in their doctrinal definitions. We have learned to distinguish (1) Biblical theology, (2) the history of dogma, (3) the doctrine of the creeds, (4) the speculations of the dogmatic theologians. The systems now in use in the United States, for the most part, were constructed without any use whatever of the more fundamental departments of theological science, and yet in childlike simplicity and cool dogmatism it is assumed that they are Biblical, churchly, and confessional. When the creeds

of the churches are tested by the Bible and by history, they do not sustain the test well enough to resist the demands for revision and for new and simpler creeds. I have recently shown that the churches subscribing to the Westminster Confession have widely drifted from it in the teaching of their leading theologians and in the preaching of the pulpits.

"The Westminster system has been virtually displaced by the teachings of the dogmatic divines. It is no longer practically the standard of the faith of the Presbyterian Church. The catechisms are not taught in our churches, the confessions are not expounded in our theological seminaries. The Presbyterian Church is not orthodox, judged by its own standards. It has neither the old orthodoxy nor the new orthodoxy. It is drifting toward an unknown and a mysterious future."*

I have also shown in another place, by a comparative table of the Westminster Confession and two of the leading dogmatic systems of recent times, that the proportions of the faith of the Westminster Confession have entirely changed.

"New doctrines have come into the field, old doctrines have been discarded; some doctrines have been depressed, other doctrines have been exalted. The systems are different in their structure, in their order of material, in the material itself, in its proportions, and in the structural principles. The essential and necessary articles of about one half of the Westminster system are in these systems, but the other half, with its essential articles, is not there."†

I have also shown from a table of all the proof texts of the Westminster Confession that 667 texts are from the epistles of Paul and the epistle to the Hebrews, and only 248 from the Gospels and 247 from the other writers of the New Testament.

"Thus the Confession is built on the words of Paul rather than the words of the Lord Jesus. It is Pauline rather than comprehensively Christian."‡

"There are so many omissions of important doctrines of Holy Scripture, there is such a disproportionate use of the darker and gloomier side of the Bible, and such a neglect of the brighter and more gracious side, and there is such a difference between the Confession and the preaching of the pulpit and the reading of the Bible in our homes, that something more than revision will be required to meet the necessities of the case, and we must set our faces toward the new creed as the only adequate solution of the difficulties of the situation."§

* "Whither?" pp. 223-224.

† Ibid., p. 139.

‡ "How Shall We Revise?" p. 11.

§ Ibid., pp. 181-2.

The Westminster Confession having already been displaced by dogmatic systems, these will give way to new systems constructed on more scientific principles and in closer harmony with the Bible and history. Such systems will distinguish between the essential and the non-essential in Christian doctrine, and thus prepare the way for a consensus creed expressing the essential doctrines in the forms suitable for public worship, reserving the non-essential doctrines for the discussion of the class room, the lecture, the treatise, and the club.

The Church of England and her daughters no longer regard belief in the entire body of the Thirty-nine Articles as essential to ministerial work. The Methodists have reduced these articles to a simpler form and are not rigid in the acceptance of them. The Congregational churches no longer insist upon the Savoy Declaration or the Cambridge Platform. The Baptist churches have no common confession of faith that binds them, but at most simple congregational creeds. The Protestant churches of the Continent have for the most part laid aside the symbols of the Reformation. Where this has not been formally done by official action, it has been really accomplished by common consent. There is a general tendency throughout Protestant Christendom toward simple statements of faith and a general acquiescence in the old ecumenical creeds as sufficient even for our times.

There have been great advances in doctrine and in dogma in modern theology. The dogmatic divines have generally laid more stress on the new doctrines than on the old ones. A recent study of the Apostles' Creed in comparison with several systems of dogmatic theology in general use at the present time showed that six of the articles of the creed (1, 2, 3, 4, 11, and 12) are elaborated in more or less fullness in the dogmatic systems; that six of them (5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10) have been to a great extent ignored, and that there are six doctrines, not in the two ancient creeds, to which the two representative dogmatic systems of Dr. Charles Hodge and Dr. W. G. T. Shedd give twice the attention that they have given to the 12 articles of the creed. These doctrines that have risen into so great importance as to suppress the ancient catholic doctrines of the Church are: (1)

inspiration of the Scriptures, (2) the divine decree, (3) original sin, (4) vicarious atonement, (5) imputation of the righteousness of Christ, (6) everlasting punishment. This group of doctrines is just where the Church is divided. These have been exaggerated in their importance, while doctrines in which there is concord are passed over lightly or else entirely overlooked. The tendency of American dogmatic speculation has been in one direction, while the tendency of the faith of the home and the pulpit has been in another direction; so that a crisis has been reached and a break has come between a so-called conservative dogmatic theology, which is really radical in its elaboration of speculative dogma, and the faith and life of the Church, which adheres to the simpler statements of the Bible and to the ancient creeds.

The tendency of thought in the present century has been toward the person and work of Jesus Christ. This urges a return to the ancient Christological creeds. The life of Christ has been studied as never before. The doctrine of the incarnation has again become prominent, especially in the Anglican Church. More attention is now given to the doctrine of the resurrection, enthronement, and second advent of our Lord. This tendency is becoming stronger every year; it will eventually become so powerful that all modern doctrines will be Christologized, and then it will be possible to put them, in their essential contents, into the devotional form, and to introduce them into the liturgical worship of the Church.

The Reformation did not go on to its completion. It came to a halt too soon. It over-emphasized justification and neglected sanctification; it exaggerated faith and depreciated holy love and good works. It threw away purgatory and left the middle state between death and the resurrection a blank. It is now clear to the historical critic that there is one-sidedness in Protestantism as well as in Roman Catholicism; that neither of these great religious bodies is to conquer the other; and that a reconciliation can take place only by each overcoming its own defects and becoming more comprehensively Christian.

Modern critical philosophy, science in all its branches, history, and the critical study of the Bible are all working together

to give the theologian treasures of truth unknown to former ages. The critical study of the Bible makes it a richer and a grander book, and finds mines of doctrines, new as well as old. The Church, to the thoughtful student of history, becomes sublime, notwithstanding all its defects, as the Kingdom of Christ on earth. The reason, in the researches of modern science and philosophy, has become a vastly more potent factor in the apprehension and in the comprehension of divine truth. There is a reconciliation to be looked for, to be longed for, and to be labored for, in the future, to which Churchman, Rationalist, and Evangelical may each contribute. We may reasonably expect that the theological conflicts, the dissolutions of old theology, the reconstruction of new theology, the intense and eager researches after the truth of God, will result in a crisis in which all of the forces of Christianity will come into play in order to give birth to a new age of the world in which the discord of Christendom will die away, and concord will live and reign and express its new faith and new life in a creed, a choral of praise to the triune God, in which all the essential doctrines of Christianity, learned from all the struggles and triumphs of twenty centuries, will be grouped about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In this period of transition there is need of patience, charity, courage, sound judgment, and at the same time passion for the truth. There are some who would do away with all creeds. To these we reply that the Church has had creeds from the beginning. It must have them to express its faith and life and unity. The excesses committed by the modern Church in all its branches ought not to drive us into opposite excesses. Let us correct the evil, remove the error, and make no more mistakes. Let every Christian rally to the position of the Anglican Church that the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are sufficient.

There are others who still insist upon subscription to the elaborate creeds of the modern Church. I have no difficulty myself in subscribing to the Westminster Confession in the historic sense of the terms of subscription as interpreted by the Adopting Act of 1729, and defined by the synod of New York and New Jersey. But I have difficulty in uniting with others in the Presbyterian Church in exacting such subscription as a con-

dition of ministerial service. And I shall do all in my power to relieve tender consciences and to remove the stumbling blocks from the way of the troubled seekers after truth. The Westminster Confession is a system of doctrine of exceeding value as the historic expression of the theology of the Puritan divines of the seventeenth century; but it contains a large amount of doctrine that is rejected by the vast majority of Protestant ministers, and much of it is not essential or even of very great importance. Presbyterians should, however, be patient and loving, and in chivalric contest endeavor to bring about the revision that is needed.

The aim of Christianity is to march forward toward the full realization of the Christian ideal. We should use our utmost endeavor to construct a new consensus creed that will better express Christian faith than the old creeds. The Alliance of Presbyterian churches is approaching this problem with some degree of hopefulness of ultimate success. When each of the great alliances of Christian denominations has reduced its symbols to consensus creeds, it will be easier to frame a consensus creed in which all may unite. It is evident that the twentieth century will have great problems to solve in the relation of Church and creed, and thoughtful men in all denominations are preparing for the crisis.

C. A. BRIGGS.



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